

1616

8

How to identify

GENUINE
MAHOGANY

and avoid

SUBSTITUTES



Plain Stripe, Quartered



Wide Broken Stripe



Large Block Mottle



Fiddle-back Figure

Mahogany *C. M. Gay 12/10/49*

How to Identify
GENUINE MAHOGANY
and Avoid
SUBSTITUTES

Geo. N. Lamb

This book is for those who appreciate the rare beauty and "stay-ability" of genuine Mahogany — nature's perfect gift from the tropical jungle. It is hoped that the information here presented will help the many lovers of Mahogany to avoid imitations and substitutes and assist them in the selection of the genuine, to their lasting satisfaction.



Copyright 1940
by the
MAHOGANY ASSOCIATION, INC.
75 East Wacker Drive
CHICAGO
Printed in U.S.A.



*Mahogany grows only as widely scattered trees in
the depth of the tropical jungle.*

SAFE RULES

For Inexperienced Buyers

If the buyer is in a hurry or does not wish to acquire the special information necessary to be able to recognize Mahogany, the following are three rules that will make it possible to avoid substitutes when inquiring for furniture of genuine Mahogany:

1. Purchase only from a retailer with an established reputation for honest dealing.
2. Look for the official Mahogany Association label. All genuine Mahogany furniture is not yet so labeled but all furniture so labeled is warranted by the manufacturer to be genuine Mahogany since under the terms of the license covering the use of Mahogany Association labels, they may be affixed only to genuine Mahogany furniture.
3. If furniture is unlabeled, insist that a full guarantee be written on the invoice by the retailer. Furniture represented as solid genuine Mahogany or represented as genuine Mahogany should be so described on the invoice. Unwillingness to do so raises a doubt as to the accuracy of the representations that have been made.

HOW TO IDENTIFY MAHOGANY

Mahogany in the unfinished state ranges from yellowish and pinkish to golden brown in color. With the stains and bleaches available to the wood finisher, color is not a determining factor in the identification of the wood in finished pieces. Most present day Mahogany furniture is finished so as to bring out the natural color of the wood, i.e., a sherry brown color.

Mahogany wood shows well distributed but not crowded pores, from medium to rather large in size. They show up on smooth surfaces as distinct but fine pen lines, dashes or dots according to whether the cut runs with or across the grain. In the pores there are occasional dark glistening black deposits; more rarely the pores also contain a whitish substance. Successive growth rings are marked by fine concentric lines in American Mahogany but these lines are not usually present in African Mahogany. The rays or flakes are fine but show up minutely on perfectly quartered pieces. On flat cut surfaces

FOOTNOTE: Four things are combined in a piece of furniture, material, design, workmanship and finish. The Mahogany Association label guarantees only that the wood is genuine Mahogany. However, when you buy genuine Mahogany, at least reasonably good design, craftsmanship and finish can be taken for granted. Quality materials are seldom wasted in interior products.

the rays appear in rows in American Mahogany and usually are staggered in African Mahogany although this can be seen clearly only with a hand lens.

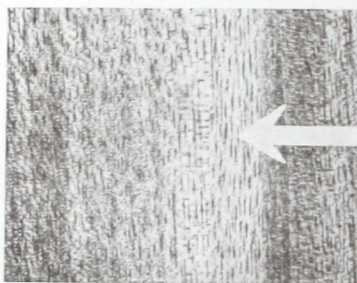
Genuine Mahogany, when properly finished, has a fine-grained, silky appearance, and a rich color that seems to come from below the surface of the wood. Figured Mahogany is additionally characterized by the way in which it catches light.

Figure in Mahogany is the result of irregular grain. As the angle of sight moves straight across the grain of a figured surface, the dark places remain dark and the light places remain light. However, when the angle of sight changes in the direction of the long way of the grain, light and dark areas will interchange, giving an almost iridescent effect.



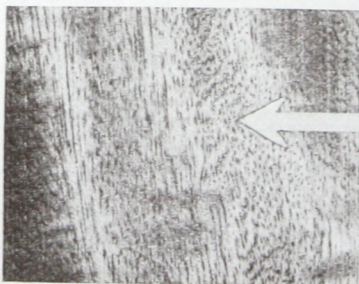
LINES...

When a Mahogany surface is cut with the grain, the pores show irregularly as fine pen lines.



DASHES...

When the cut is very slightly across the grain, the pores appear as short dashes.



DOTS...

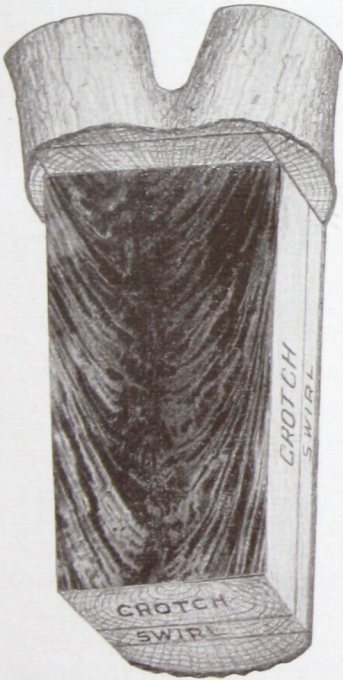
Where the cut is rather strongly across the grain, the pores appear as dots.

FIGURE IN MAHOGANY

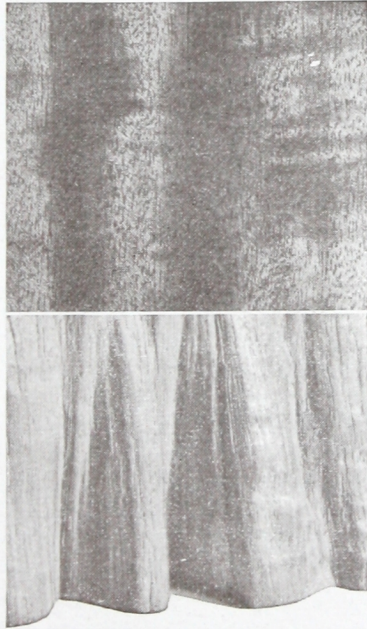
Among the things that help to identify Mahogany are the many and beautiful figures that occur in it. Perhaps no other wood is so richly endowed or shows such variety. Like many other tropical woods Mahogany has an "interlocking" grain. This characteristic produces some kind of a stripe or ribbon effect on quartered surfaces. In addition to this general characteristic many trees also show some "curl" in the grain and this is responsible for endless combinations of broken stripe, rope, mottle and fiddle figures.

Most distinctive, and generally considered the most beautiful of wood figures are the famed Mahogany crotches and swirls. These are rich in contrasting surfaces and in endless variety of pattern.

On the inside of the front and back covers of this book are shown the outstanding types of Mahogany figures.



The section just below a fork in the tree produces Mahogany's swirl and crotch veneer.



The lower part is wood split with the grain in order to show interwoven grain; above, the resulting figure.

COMMON MAHOGANY SUBSTITUTES

(We do not disparage any of the less expensive woods that are frequently finished to resemble Mahogany. Such woods have their uses, their place in the economic scheme and are entitled to receive any treatment at the wood finisher's command that will make them more attractive. The point we wish to emphasize as strongly as possible is that they should stand on their own merits and in their own names and not appropriate the name "Mahogany" to gain popular acceptance.)

GUMWOOD:

This plentiful southern hardwood lumber is the most common substitute used for solid framework construction in connection with Mahogany veneers. It can be distinguished from Mahogany quite easily as the pores in the wood are too small to see with the naked eye. If you can't make out the pores, it's probably gumwood. Anyway, it isn't Mahogany.

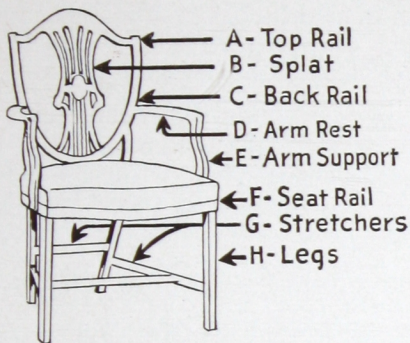
BIRCH:

The northern yellow birch is another hardwood often given a "Mahogany" finish. It has even been called "Birch Mahogany." It is heavier and harder than gumwood. The pores are about half-way in size between those of gumwood and Mahogany. In good light they are fine but distinct. If one cannot quite make up his mind whether it is birch or Mahogany it is usually birch.

PHILIPPINE HARDWOODS:

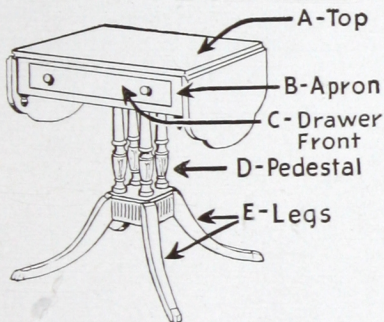
Under the name "Philippine Mahogany" a half dozen or more different species of the Dipterocarp family are being marketed in the United States. These woods come from trees in no way related to the trees that produce genuine Mahogany. In furniture these woods are used largely as solid lumber. When given a conventional Mahogany finish, they show a superficial resemblance to Mahogany. Quartered stock especially shows a stripe figure not unlike that of Mahogany. When compared with Mahogany, however, the pores are larger and the appearance coarser. These woods are mostly plain and have little figure except the plain flat cut or the quartered stripe. Mahogany shows more life and more depth and changeableness. The term "Philippine Mahogany" bears somewhat the same relation to genuine Mahogany that the term "Hudson Seal" (dyed muskrat) occupies with relation to genuine sealskin.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR SUBSTITUTES



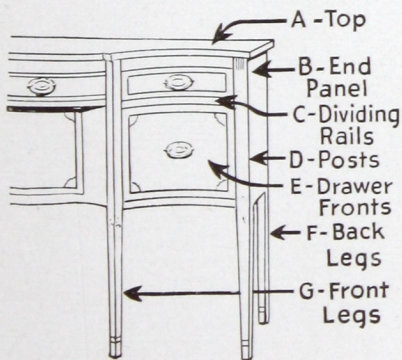
CHAIRS...

The seat rail, arm supports and legs are the parts most commonly substituted. To be genuine Mahogany, the parts as indicated, also should be Mahogany.



TABLES...

The most common substitution in tables is a Mahogany top with supporting parts in a substitute. To be sure of getting genuine Mahogany, the parts as indicated also should be Mahogany.



DRESSERS...

When there is substitution in "cases" the top and drawer fronts are usually Mahogany. The parts as indicated also should be Mahogany.

SOLID GENUINE MAHOGANY

Mahogany is the only fine cabinet wood of which there is an ample supply of lumber available at a reasonable cost. This lumber is also available in greater widths and lengths and with greater freedom from defect than other fine woods. Accordingly, solid Mahogany furniture is readily available and such furniture has several distinct advantages.

In the first place there is more figure in Mahogany lumber than in the lumber of other cabinet woods, so that tops and fronts of a dresser or sideboard may be made uniform by selection of boards of similar appearance either in flat cut or quartered surfaces. Thus, solid Mahogany has much to offer in appearance with a variety of stripes, flat cut and swirly figures available.

The making of cases such as dressers or sideboards of solid lumber calls for its own technique, but this technique, properly followed, produces furniture with a high degree of stability. Solid furniture is comparatively easy to repair and



Because of the large dimensions of Mahogany, it is possible to make one-piece tops such as in this reproduction of a Chippendale tilt-top, pie-crust table.

refinish if it should happen to receive undue abuse. The record of solid Mahogany furniture that has passed through the ordeal of flood is outstanding.

GENUINE MAHOGANY

Under this description will be found the major part of the Mahogany "case goods" made today. Typically, as in a dresser, the exposed framework is of solid Mahogany lumber and the top, sides and drawer fronts are of Mahogany-faced plywood. One advantage of this construction is the greater beauty available through use of figured and matched veneers as well as the equalizing of strength and stability in both directions of the panel. "Veneered" has long been a term of opprobrium but properly made plywood, bonded with modern glues is very decidedly a quality product. This type of construction is often advertised as "all Mahogany" in retail stores with no intent to misrepresent. This is a term that grew up in the trade to distinguish such a piece as a table with a Mahogany plywood top and solid Mahogany legs from one that has legs of a substitute wood. While it is in no way deceptive in the trade, it is capable of misleading the uninformed public and therefore it is a descriptive term that should not be used.



*This superb dining room shows English Regency at its best
— the last great style of the century of Mahogany.*

"COMBINATION MAHOGANY"

(This is a misnomer for "Mahogany and Birch," etc. Since the wood of lesser value is not mentioned, it is therefore a deceptive term that should not be used.)

The type of construction sometimes called "Combination Mahogany" is much less common with Mahogany than in furniture in which other kinds of veneers are used. Very common descriptions of this type of construction are "Mahogany veneers" — "Top in matched Mahogany veneers," etc. Such descriptions may be deceptive because, while they stress the use of veneers with seeming candor, they neglect to inform the public that exposed solid structural parts are of a substitute wood. The obvious reason for such construction is a reduction in cost that may be as small as \$2.00 in the retail cost of an ordinary dining chair. Another term for this construction is "Mahogany and selected hardwood," thus avoiding specific mention of the name of the substitute.



"MAHOGANY FINISH"

(If only this description is given without the actual name of the wood used, the term "Mahogany Finish" is misleading and should be avoided.)

In most stores, for convenience, economy of effort or perhaps due to a policy of telling as little as possible, there is no place on the tag designated for the name of the wood or woods used in the piece of furniture. There is a place only for finish, usually followed by such abbreviations as "Mah."

or "Mhy." The public, knowing of rooms and walls "trimmed" or "finished" in Mahogany, often assume that "Mahogany finish" on a furniture tag means that the piece is made of Mahogany. "Mahogany finish" is the usual term applied to a substitute wood finished to resemble Mahogany. Variations in this deceptive term may be "finished in rich, brown, two-toned, or antique Mahogany," as the case may be.

Another kind of "finish" is especially dangerous to the unwary buyer. We refer to photographic transfers of beautifully figured and matched cabinet woods applied to other wood surfaces. Such finishes are out and out imitations and should be so described on tags and in advertising. They can be detected by putting the piece in a good light and noting a certain light or dark section. In real wood dark sections become light and light sections dark as the angle of sight changes in the direction of the long way of the grain. In the photographic surface all dark areas stay dark and all light areas stay light, no matter from what angle it is viewed. These imitation finishes have a flat artificial appearance and do not wear like real wood. The "changeableness" of figured wood is something that cannot be imitated.

Radio cabinets in Mahogany are now available in a wide range of styles to harmonize with 18th Century Mahogany furniture. This cabinet was inspired by John Goddard of Newport, R.I., who created beautiful block-front chests.



SOLID OR VENEERED

There is a very deep-rooted belief that if furniture is "solid" it is better than furniture that is only "veneered." There is also much propaganda that the liability to warp and crack can be avoided only by veneered construction. As a matter of fact, neither description is a sole criterion of quality. The very best and the very worst furniture has been made both solid and veneered for 200 years and today is still being made *both* ways.

The Van Pelt Mahogany highboy in the design of the Philadelphia Chippendale school, which sold a few years ago for \$44,000.00, was veneered in beautiful crotch Mahogany. The Benjamin Randolph Chippendale wing chair that brought \$33,000.00 at the same sale, was of solid Mahogany. In present day furniture we have all seen cheap furniture poorly made of inferior woods both in solid and veneered construction.

Both types of construction are valuable to the art of making good furniture. The usefulness of each type varies



This chest is made of solid Mahogany lumber with a modest but pleasing figure.

with the kind of furniture, i.e., chair, dresser, and its design. There are proper construction methods for using each successfully. Generally, lumber is more advisable for structural, turned or carved parts. Generally, plywood is indicated for larger flat surfaces.

The main advantage of plywood is the use of large, figured or matched surface pieces, giving a pattern and a beauty not possible with solid lumber. Plywood construction also equalizes strength and stability in both directions of the surface. On the other hand, furniture properly designed and constructed of solid lumber can take more punishment and be repaired and refinished more successfully and at less cost.

The reason for this is that veneers are comparatively thin and rightly so because the thinner veneers are, up to a certain point, the better they behave. If such surfaces are smashed or broken through the surface veneer, repairing is difficult and expensive. On the other hand, solid wood may be sanded down to the extent necessary to remove the blemish of misuse and then be refinished.

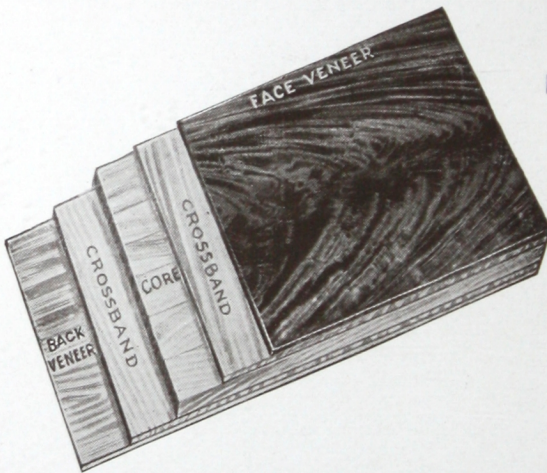


This chest has its frame of solid Mahogany and the top, sides and front of Mahogany-faced plywood. Note the highly figured crotch on the front.

PLYWOOD

Plywood may be any number of layers of wood but usually an odd number, and five layers are typical of the plywood used in furniture. The center layer is usually made of rather narrow boards, glued edge to edge. The thickness of this core depends upon the required thickness of the panel. Next on both sides of this core are layers with the grain running at right angles to it. These layers are called crossbanding and are usually $1/20''$ in thickness. Over each crossband, with the grain running the way of the grain of the core, are the face and back veneers, usually $1/28''$ in thickness.

There are many places in furniture construction where plywood is necessary; for instance, in a thin irregular shaped chair splat fastened only at the top and bottom. The pierced gallery around an occasional table top is another good example. The grand piano rim is probably the most outstanding instance of plywood construction.



TYPICAL
FIVE-PLY
PLYWOOD
PANEL

In furniture labeled "Genuine Mahogany" all exposed surfaces are either of Mahogany faced plywood or of solid Mahogany lumber.

Many people still cling to the idea that "veneering" is the covering of something that is shoddy with a thin layer of something that is fine. The use of the word "veneer" in literature tends to confirm this definition. As a matter of fact the art of veneering and inlaying is thousands of years old and today, through the use of improved processes and adhesives, plywood has become a very superior product.

HOW TO JUDGE QUALITY IN FURNITURE

The best rule is to patronize only stores that have a well-established reputation for honest merchandise and honest merchandising. Because a great deal of the real quality in furniture is hidden, it always pays to buy from a reliable source. The next best advice is—be sure that you get genuine Mahogany furniture. If it is genuine Mahogany, you may be sure that design, workmanship and finish will be at least reasonably good for the price, for no manufacturer is going to buy a quality material with which to turn out inferior merchandise.

Some of the earmarks of quality you can see for yourself. Carvings should be clean, sharp and smooth. Turnings should be clean and smooth. Plywood should be smooth and flat. Stand so that the light strikes a table top at an angle. That will show up any waviness or depressions. Examine drawer interiors for clean, dove-tail or lock-joint construction. Note whether the drawer interiors are smoothly finished. Turn up chairs to see if frame is well joined with tight fitting, glued and screwed corner blocks. Don't be too much impressed with so-called "dust-proof" construction. In good furniture this consists of a tight-fitting framed panel between drawers. Even poorly constructed furniture may boast some kind of dust-proof construction, a thin sheet of rotary cut veneer or even composition board tacked in. Avoid muddy finishes and dark stains that virtually conceal the wood. On dressers or other cases look for plywood backs set flush into the frame and applied with screws rather than backs of card or composition board nailed on. Note the care with which doors and drawers have been fitted. Compare the furniture you contemplate buying with furniture that you know is of fine quality. Beware of high pressure selling methods, undue emphasis on easy credit terms and read everything carefully before you sign. Always remember that it is far better to buy a few good pieces adding others as you can, than to buy a lot of junk that will be a headache before it is paid for.

DESCRIPTIONS OF WOOD FURNITURE

The prospective buyer of furniture should know that there are definite rules for describing wood furniture. These rules were established in 1925 by the Federal Trade Commission after conferences with the lumber and furniture industries. These rules with interpretations are self-explanatory, but it should be especially noted that wood descriptions apply only to exposed surfaces.

Rules for the Designation of Furniture Woods

RULE I

Furniture in which exposed surfaces are of one wood shall be designated by the name of the wood.

RULE II

Furniture in which the exposed surfaces are of more than one kind of wood shall be designated by the names of the principal woods used.

Interpretation of Rules

1. Exposed surfaces mean those parts of a piece of furniture which are exposed to view when the piece is placed in the generally accepted position for use.

2. The exposed surfaces of all furniture or parts thereof represented as solid shall be of solid wood of the kind or kinds designated. * (If veneered on the same wood, it may be designated as a wood of that particular kind. If veneered on a different wood, it shall be described as veneered.)

3. Cabinet woods, used for decorative purposes where the effect is solely to add to the artistic value, shall be named as decorations only.

4. A wood popularly regarded as of lesser value, if its use is essential to construction, need not be named under Rule II, if less than a substantial amount is used on exposed surfaces.

5. A wood popularly regarded as of higher value, shall not be named under Rule II, if an insubstantial amount of that wood is used, except as provided in Interpretation 3, above.

6. Designations shall be made in the caption or body of each particular description without qualification elsewhere.

7. The word "Finish" to designate color, shall only be used as a description, following the name of the wood used.

8. Where furniture is cataloged, tagged, labeled, advertised or sold, by retailers, it shall be in accordance with these Rules and Interpretations.

9. Where furniture is cataloged, tagged, labeled, advertised, invoiced, or sold, by manufacturers, manufacturers' representatives, jobbers or wholesalers, it shall be in accordance with these Rules and Interpretations.

10. The above Rules need not apply to antique furniture.

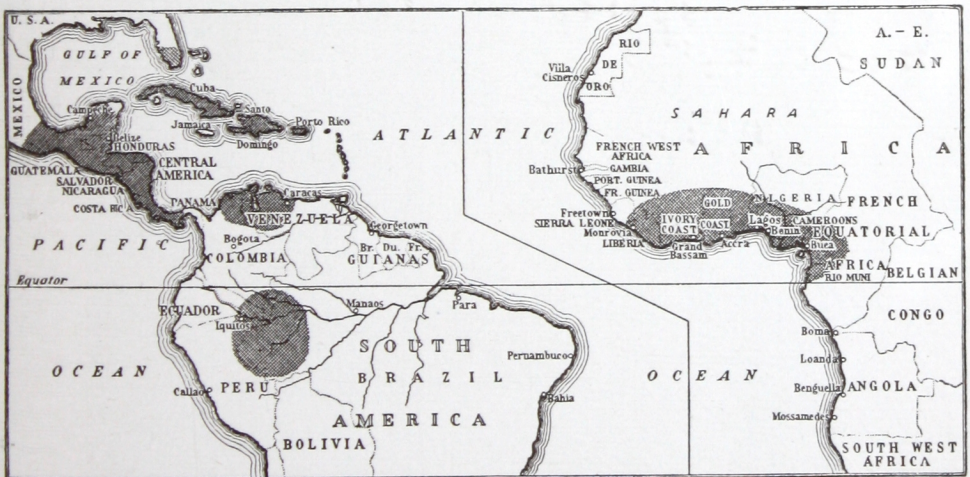
**The validity of the portion of rule No. 2 included within the brackets was challenged by the Berkey & Gay Furniture Company, et al, in a proceeding before the United States District Court of Appeals, 6th Circuit and under date of June 28, 1930. The said United States Circuit Court of Appeals set aside the said portion of Interpretation No. 2. While said decision would not necessarily be controlling in any new proceeding before the Federal Trade Commission involving this question, nevertheless the fact that no appeal was taken by the Federal Trade Commission from the said decision raises a serious question as to the validity and enforceability of the said portion of Interpretation No. 2.*

THE SOURCES OF MAHOGANY

Mahogany is native only to Tropical America and Africa. Commercially, only three species are important, although Mahogany is known by many geographical names indicating established origins. Thus the West Indian species (*Swietenia mahagoni*) is marketed as Cuban and Santo Domingo Mahogany, although formerly Jamaica, the Bahamas and other West Indian islands were sources of production.

On the mainland, we have another species (*Swietenia macrophylla*) with Honduras, Mexican and Tabasco as the best known source names, but with production also from Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama. In the past some Mahogany has come from Colombia and Venezuela, also for the past twenty years the upper Amazon in western Brazil and Peru have become important sources. The Mahogany from the upper Amazon is known as Peruvian and Amazon Mahogany.

Mahogany also comes from the Gold and Ivory Coasts and from Nigeria on the west coast of Africa and the principal species (*Khaya ivorensis*) is known in this country only as African Mahogany. African Mahogany is the source of our most highly figured veneers.



Map showing the areas where Mahogany is grown.

THE MAHOGANY LABELS

Fortunately it is not necessary for the buyer of furniture to be a wood expert in order to be sure of getting genuine Mahogany. The Mahogany Association, Inc., have prepared copyright labels that are the exclusive property of the association. These labels are issued to responsible manufacturers of furniture under a license which provides severe penalty for misuse.

Although all Mahogany furniture does not yet carry these labels, they give to the purchasing public the best possible protection against the sale of substitutes as genuine Mahogany. In addition to the labels, there are also tags and seals for use on pieces where the label cannot readily be applied.

The Mahogany labels are colored transfers that cannot be removed from one piece of furniture and applied to another. On a case, such as a dresser, the label is usually applied to an upper drawer side, occasionally to the drawer bottom. On tables and chairs the labels are most frequently applied underneath. On a bed they are usually applied to the back of the headboard.

When buying Mahogany furniture
always ask to see these labels.



Mahogany bedroom furniture in contemporary design. Finish honey tone, trimmed in chocolate brown.



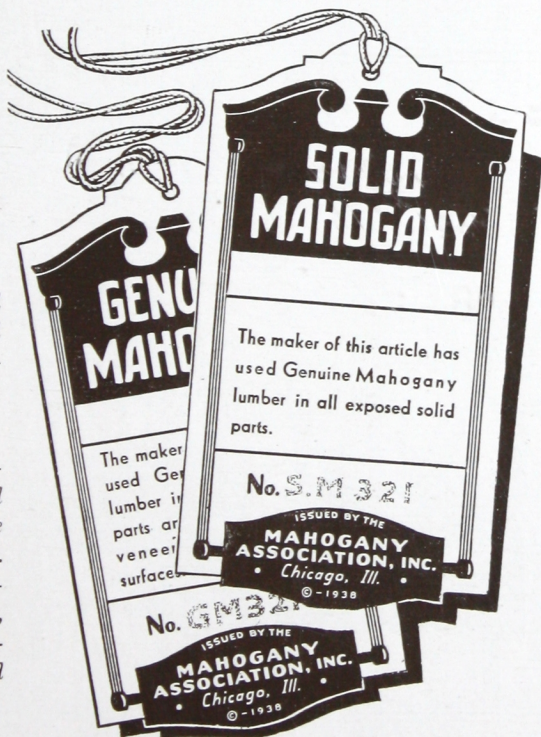
More than 180 manufacturers have entered into a license agreement with the Mahogany Association for the use of these labels and they may be found on Mahogany furniture in any good store.

Blue Label, Genuine Mahogany
Red Label, Solid Genuine Mahogany



Exact size of gold seal for small Mahogany novelty pieces.

These identification tags are used both with the labels and alone. While of a temporary character, they should accompany delivered furniture.





*Queen Anne
1702-1714*



*Early Georgian
1720-1740*



*Chippendale Lived
1718-1779*



*Hepplewhite
Died 1786*



*Sheraton Lived
1751-1806*

MAHOGANY STYLES

One of the grandest things about Mahogany is that it came into general use during the hundred years that mark the golden era of good furniture design. The "Century of Mahogany" covered the span from 1725 to 1825. During that century there were developed Early Georgian, Chippendale, Adam, Hepplewhite, Sheraton and Regency in England with their counterparts in America: late Colonial and Federal American as exemplified by Duncan Phyfe and other great American cabinetmakers. Mahogany also found its way into French furniture of the Louis XV and Louis XVI and Empire periods.

These styles embrace practically all of the traditional furniture that is beautiful and practical for our homes of the present day. No other wood approaches Mahogany in the variety and beauty of traditional designs that are authentic only in Mahogany. Mahogany was the cabi-

net wood used by the great masters and Mahogany produced the cream of the crop as garnered and treasured by museums and collectors.

In addition to the undisputed authenticity of Mahogany for the favored traditional styles it also gives all of its beauty, stability and durability to fine furniture in contemporary or modern design. It is available in the widest range of figure and in finishes from blond through the natural honey tones to the rich depth of the traditional "Old World" finishes.

No matter whether your preference is for traditional or contemporary styles, both are always available and always better when in Mahogany. As long as the human race continues to cherish the natural product of the forest, Mahogany will find no serious competitor as the world's No. 1 cabinet wood, a position gained through centuries of preference by those of discriminating taste.



Contemporary
1940



Duncan Phyfe Lived
1758-1854



Louis XVI
1774-1793



English Regency
1800-1825



Colonial American
Until 1775

THE MANY ADVANTAGES OF MAHOGANY

The leadership of Mahogany as the premier cabinet wood is not an overnight fad, here today and gone tomorrow. It has stood the test of time through several centuries. It has competed with the great woods of the world and has emerged as the first choice of those who know fine cabinet woods.

It has variety as well as enduring and increasing beauty. From plain to highly figured and in both solid lumber and in veneers, it is available at reasonable prices in fine dimensions and with freedom from defect. It has long been the cabinet-maker's choice for it is kind to tools and repays the finisher in four-fold beauty.

Mahogany leads the field in stability and its strength and durability are confirmed by the prized possessions of the great museums. Apparently the chemical nature of Mahogany tends to repel certain types of wood destroying insects and tends to make Mahogany resistant to organisms of decay.

Mahogany is the ideal wood for the expression of the finest in contemporary design while it is the one historically correct and authentic cabinet wood for those favored styles of the golden age of furniture design, be it Georgian, Chippendale, Hepplewhite, Sheraton, Colonial or Federal American, Louis XV, Louis XVI, Empire or English Regency.

And it's as true today as it was 100 years ago that —

"After all
THERE'S NOTHING LIKE
MAHOGANY"



THE OLDEST MAHOGANY IN THE WORLD

The Mahogany used in this hand-made Chippendale chair came from a beam of a demolished house that was built between 1509 and 1515 in the city of Santo Domingo by Don Francisco Clavijo, a follower of Don Bartolome Columbus, brother of the discoverer of the new world. At the time it was on the "Street of Clavijo," but it is now number 39 of the street "27th of February." This rich wood mellowed by over 425 years is undoubtedly the oldest Mahogany in the world.



Mahogany has been the first choice of master craftsmen from the time of Chippendale down to the present day.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

"There is hardly anything in the world that some man cannot make a little worse and sell a little cheaper and the people who consider price only are this man's lawful prey."

— Ruskin



Highly Figured Swirl



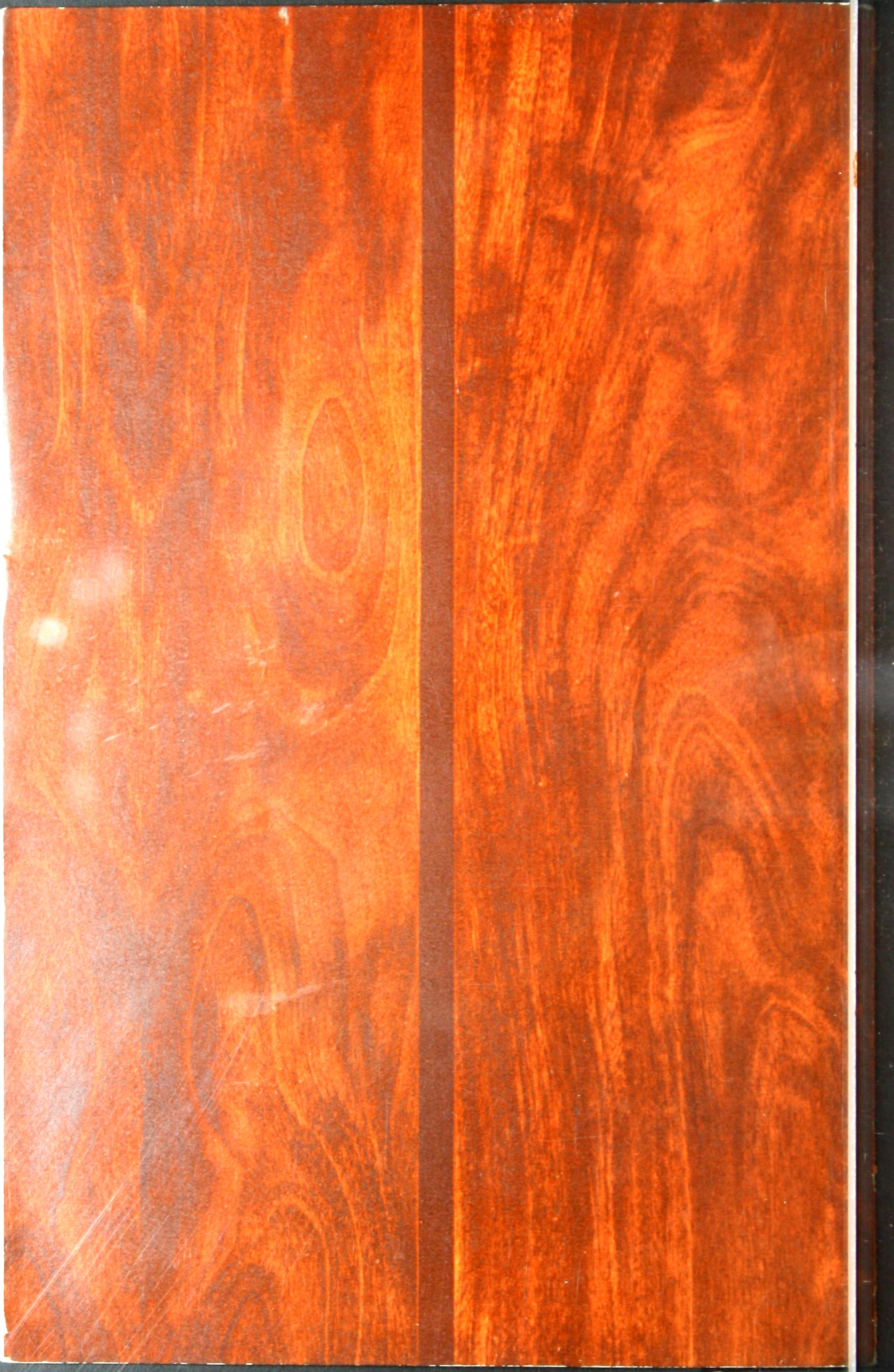
Crotch Figure



Figured Flat Cut



Plain or Flat Cut



Digitized by:



ASSOCIATION FOR
PRESERVATION TECHNOLOGY,
INTERNATIONAL

BUILDING
TECHNOLOGY
HERITAGE
LIBRARY

www.apti.org

From the collection of:



CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE /
CENTRE CANADIEN D'ARCHITECTURE

www.cca.qc.ca